



## What is Sleep Apnea?

Sleep apnea is a potentially serious sleep disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts. If you snore loudly and feel tired even after a full night's sleep, you might have sleep apnea.



# Sleep Apnea

## Causes of Sleep Apnea

**Obstructive Sleep Apnea** Is the most common type of sleep apnea. This is when the throat muscles relax, your airway narrows or closes as you breathe in. You can't get enough air, which can lower the oxygen level in your blood. Your brain senses your inability to breathe and briefly rouses you from sleep so that you can reopen your airway. This awakening is usually so brief that you don't remember it. You might snort, choke or gasp. This pattern can repeat itself 5 to 30 times or more each hour, all night, impairing your ability to reach the deep, restful phases of sleep.

**Central Sleep Apnea** This less common form of sleep apnea occurs when your brain fails to transmit signals to your breathing muscles. This means that you make no effort to breathe for a short period. You might awaken with shortness of breath or have a difficult time getting to sleep or staying asleep.

## Diagnosis

An evaluation often involves overnight monitoring at a sleep center of your breathing and other body functions during sleep. Home sleep testing also might be an option. Tests to detect sleep apnea include:

- ❖ **Nocturnal polysomnography:** During this test, you're hooked up to equipment that monitors your heart, lung, and brain activity, breathing patterns, arm and leg movements, and blood oxygen levels while you sleep.
- ❖ **Home sleep tests:** Your doctor might provide you with simplified tests to be used at home to diagnose sleep apnea. These tests usually measure your heart rate, blood oxygen level, airflow and breathing patterns.

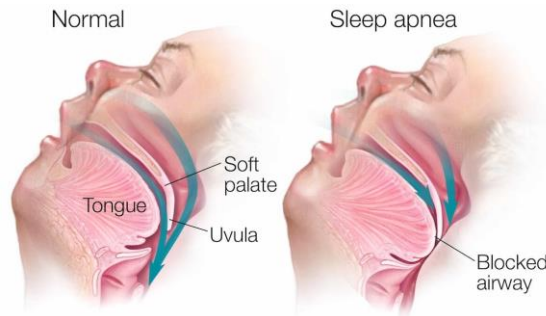


# Treatment

## What can happen if sleep apnea is left untreated?

If left untreated, sleep apnea can increase the risk of health problems including:

- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Heart Failure
- Irregular heart beats
- Heart attacks
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Headaches
- Liver problems



- ❖ **CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure)**  
If you have moderate to severe sleep apnea, you might benefit from using a machine that delivers air pressure through a mask while you sleep.
- ❖ **Oral Appliances** Another option is wearing an oral appliance designed to keep your throat open. CPAP is more reliably effective than oral appliances, but oral appliances might be easier to use.
- ❖ **Supplemental Oxygen** Using supplemental oxygen while you sleep might help if you have central sleep apnea.
- ❖ **Surgery** is usually only an option after other treatments have failed. Generally, at least a three-month trial of other treatment options is suggested before considering surgery. However, for a small number of people with certain jaw structure problems, it's a good first option.

### What lifestyle changes can I make to help deal with sleep apnea?

- ❖ Lose excess weight
- ❖ Exercise
- ❖ Avoid alcohol and certain medications such as tranquilizers and sleeping pills
- ❖ Sleep on your side or abdomen rather than on your back
- ❖ Don't smoke